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ABSTRACT

This student guide for a program concerned with some of the ways in which children differ, and how parents' responses to these differences can help or hinder the child's growth and development, is designed around a magazine format to allow maximum flexibility to different groups using the materials. The guide is divided into seven sections: (1) an overview of the theme and contents; (2) a summary of the major learnings of the theme; (3) feature articles containing the major content and including practical suggestions for parents and future parents; (4) a film review section which includes a synopsis of the accompanying film program and a related discussion question; (5) three activities aimed at both individual and group participation; (6) a selection of field activities, discussion questions, and research topics designed to reinforce the ideas presented in the articles and meet the needs of a wide variety of classroom groups; and (7) a bibliography for further reading on the theme. (Author/JEG)

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CHILDREN'S INDIVIDUALITY: A FACT TO CELEBRATE

No Comparison

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A world to be born under your footsteps...
St. John Perse

FROM THE EDITORS

Human differences are a fact of life. They are not only natural, but desirable. Society needs a range of talents and personalities to function well. Young children — and even newborn babies — are individuals, too. In this booklet, you will learn about some of the ways in which children differ. You will also learn that how parents respond to these differences can either help — or hinder — children's growth and development.

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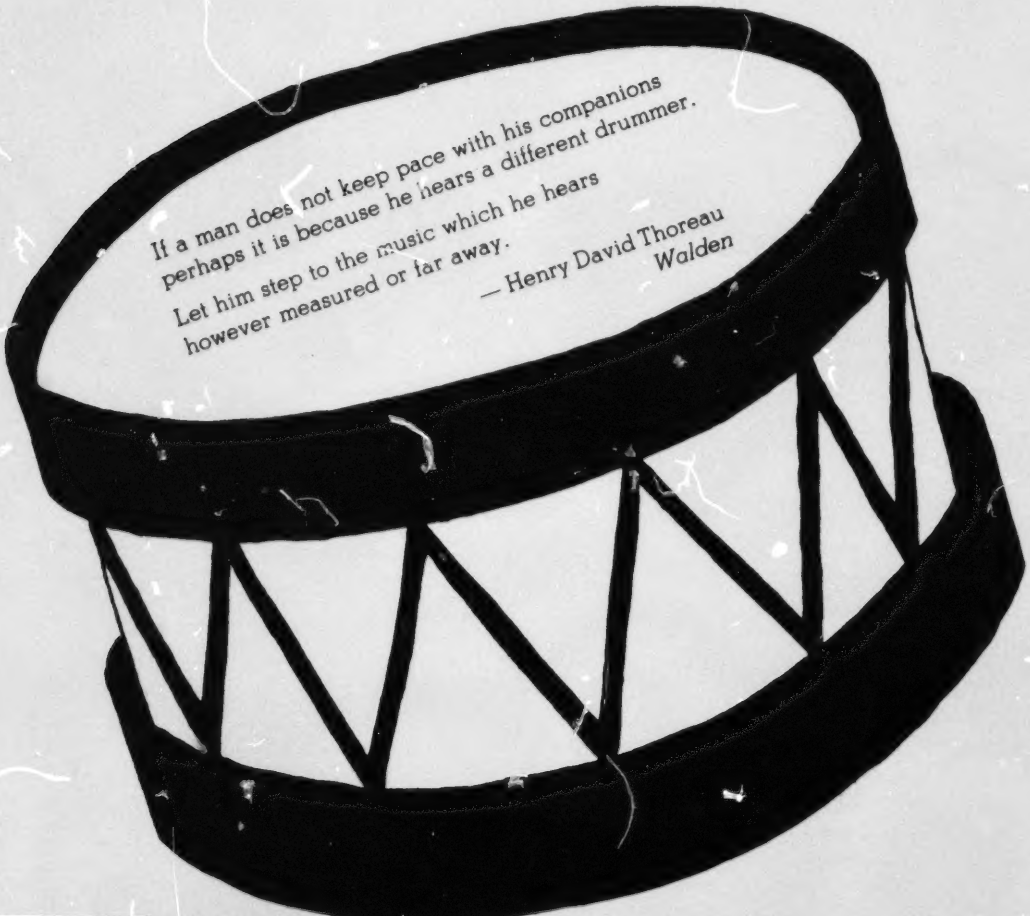
THE BIG IDEAS

- With children, as in all of nature, there is a wide range of normal differences.
- Accepting each child's individuality helps a child accomplish what is possible for him or her.
- Expecting children to be what they are *not* may hinder them in reaching their unique potential.


If a man does not keep pace with his companions
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears
however measured or far away.
— Henry David Thoreau
Walden

The One and Only You

This above all things:

To thine own self be true.

-William Shakespeare

I yam what
I yam and
thats all that
I YAM,
-Popeye the Sailorman

You are a unique experiment.

There never has been, and never will be, anyone else quite like you. In your physical, mental and emotional make-up, you are different from everyone else in the world. Just think: out of all the billions of people in the world, your fingerprints are so distinct that the FBI could catch you on that evidence alone. Or, if you didn't leave fingerprints, they could use bloodhounds to track you down by your unique smell.

Because our muscles are different, each of us has a special way of walking, talking, running, and throwing a ball. Because we have minds of our own, we vary in our ability to use language, add and subtract, and memorize. Because our nerves are strung differently, each of us sees, hears, tastes and feels pain in our own way. We differ in our energy level, sleep pattern, body temperature, interest and talents. In fact:

In virtually every area of human growth, each of us is truly an individual

A UNIQUE BEGINNING

Human differences arise from two factors: heredity and environment. Your **Heredity** is the set of genes passed down to you from your parents. Your **Environment** is all the people, things and experiences around you. When heredity and environment come together, the result is an "original." Human beings are not assembly line products. The variety among us is infinite.

The chances that two children with the same parents will inherit the same combination of genes is about 1 in 32 trillion. Parents can see differences right from birth. Some babies are quiet, others cry a lot. Some babies persist in going after what they want. Others lose interest more quickly. Some sleep all night and eat at regular times. Others wake up hungry at different times every day and night.

From the very beginning, children demand to be seen and treated as individuals.

IN THEIR OWN TIME

Children continue to express their individuality as they grow. Each child has a special timetable for growth. Some children walk at 9 months, others at 18 months. Many children can speak several hundred words by the time they're 2. But some know a lot more, and others are just beginning to talk. Some children learn to share and play with other children very easily. Others are slower to reach out to new people.

All of these children are normal. The range of normal growth is very wide, and has room for many kinds of behaviors.

Of course this does not mean that there's no such thing as being abnormal. Some growth deviations are extreme and may have treatable causes. If a child seems unusually slow in one or more areas of development, it would be a good idea to see a doctor.

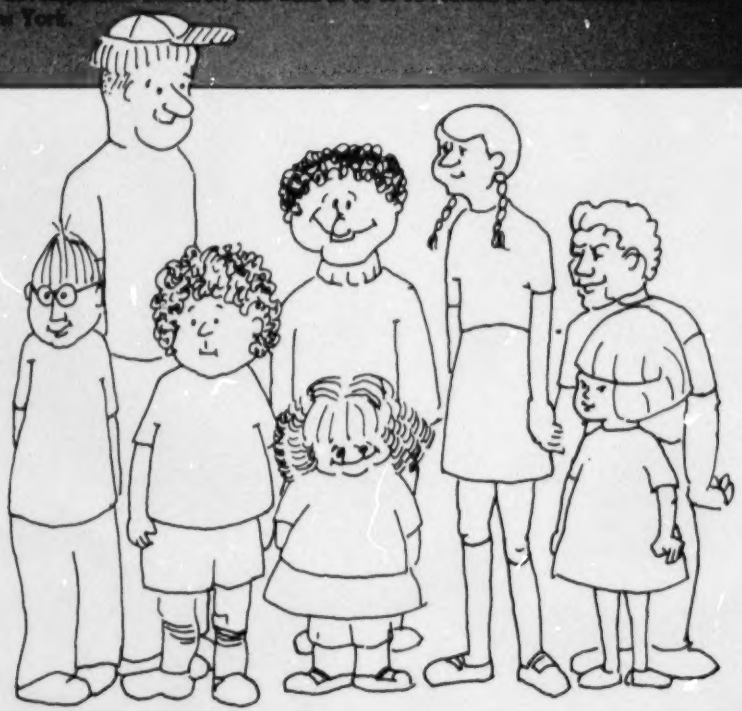
SO WHAT'S NORMAL?

Have you ever heard people refer to the "average baby?" Have you ever wondered who this "average baby" is? To find out, let's look first at what "average" means.

An average is found by finding the middle point on a range. For example, if we wanted to describe the "average state," we would add the characteristics of all states (such as population and area) and divide by 50. In this way, we would find that the "average state" has an area of 72,000 miles, a population of 3½ million, 1,800 square miles of lakes, and a highest mountain of 6000 feet.

But do you know of any actual state that meets this description? Perhaps the United States could be small as Rhode Island and as large as Alaska — as densely populated as New York and as sparsely settled as Nevada — as mountainous as Colorado and as flat as Nebraska.

Even more than with states, there is no such thing as an "average baby." Statements such as "the average child walks at 14 months" only point to the middle of a range of normal development. Children who walk at 10 or 18 months are as normal as those who walk at 14 months and New York.



A New Star is Born

Life can be looked at as a great moving picture in which each of us is a star. Our parents are the producers, but we serve as our own directors. Like the two children in the film script that follows, we provide parents with clues as to how we want to be treated from the time we are born.

Let It Roll!

ACT I

Scene 1

Joey is only 3 days old, but already he has a personality of his own.

From the minute he was born, Joey has been quiet and easygoing. After he was delivered, he lay quietly in his crib — even when he was given a shot and washed for the first time!

Now Joey fusses sometimes, but rarely cries. When he's not sleeping, he moves his arms slowly and looks around.

Both the nurses at the hospital and his parents can see that Joey is going to be very easy to please.

Scene 2

Della is also 3 days old, but she is quite different in temperament from Joey.

Even before she was born, Della was very active. She kept her mother awake at night during the last weeks before she was born "bicycling" in her stomach. When she was delivered, she came out crying and kicking.

Della still cries a lot. When she's not crying or sleeping, she's in perpetual motion — kicking, squirming, and throwing her arms about. She puts a lot of energy into everything she does.

It's not hard to see that Della is going to make a lot of demands on her parents.

ACT II

Scene 1

Joey is 6 months old now. He's been sleeping through the night and eating at regular times since he was just a few weeks old. When he cries, it's usually because he's hungry or needs his diaper changed. Since he seems to know what he wants, Joey's parents just follow his cues in feeding and caring for him.

Joey still doesn't move around a lot. When his parents try to help him sit up, he just goes limp. Joey's older brother was sitting up by this age, but his parents know there's still plenty of time.

Joey enjoys playing by himself with simple objects like blocks and cups. He loves new experiences. He smiled and cooed when he had his first bath and when he was offered solid food for the first time.

Joey's parents love having such a good-natured child.

Scene 2

At 6 months, Della is still a whirling dervish.

She spends hours doing pushups, and protests loudly if anyone interrupts her. She can sit up by herself, and loves to be held to stand.

Della is not as predictable in other areas, though. She has been sleeping through the night for just a few months now. For the first few months, she woke up 3 or 4 times every night, and napped at different times every day. Sometimes she wanted to eat just an hour after her last feeding; at other times she refused food after 4 hours.

Finally, Della's parents decided to help her adjust to regular living patterns by feeding her only at certain times. They also learned that although she would always spit out new foods at first, she would usually try them if they were offered again.

Della can be difficult, but her parents are proud to have such a lusty child.

ACT III

Scene 1

Joey is now a walking, talking child of 2 years.

He didn't start walking by himself until just 6 months ago, but he started talking at the early age of 10 months. He has quite a large vocabulary for his age, and will look at books and talk to himself for hours. He also enjoys talking with his parents, and even with strangers who pass by as he's playing in the yard.

Because he's so regular in his habits, Joey's parents were able to start toilet training him when he was only 20 months old. Since he doesn't always reach out for new things, they try extra hard to give him stimulating toys and activities. Joey accepts these happily.

His parents delight in his quiet achievements.

Scene 2

By the time she turned 2, Della had been walking for over a year.

Her parents didn't know whether to be glad or sad. They were proud that she developed so quickly. But, on the other hand, her new skill kept them busy trying to keep her out of trouble.

Now that she's 2, Della is determined to do things her own way. She has temper tantrums if anyone tries to interfere with her wishes. Her parents remain calm but firm when this happens.

Della dislikes change, and refuses to sit still long enough to use the toilet. Her parents don't push her, knowing that sooner or later she'll decide she's ready.

They continue to enjoy the storehouse of surprises that Della holds for them.

ACT IV

Scene 1

Five years have passed, and Joey has just started kindergarten.

Joey loved school from the first day. Although he sometimes prefers to stand back and watch when the other children play games, he doesn't miss a thing. He can tell his parents everything that happened in school each day.

Joey's early interest in words has continued to grow. He started to read last year. Joey's teacher encourages his interest in books, but also makes sure he has opportunities to play with other children and get physical exercise.

She continually marvels at what a sensitive and considerate child Joey is.

Scene 2

Della is in the same class as Joey, and it's interesting to see how different her adjustment to school was.

Della cried and put up a mild fuss on the first day of school. By the end of the week, though, she was starting to make friends.

The other children admire and try to imitate Della's skill on the playground. Most of them can't keep up with her, though. Everyone likes Della, even though in her enthusiasm she can be a bit rough sometimes.

It's still hard for Della to sit still very long or concentrate on one task for a long time.

Della's teacher gets quite a kick out of her, although she secretly breathes a sign of relief that not all her pupils are so energetic.

YOU CAN'T FIGHT NATURE

People of all ages have recognized and celebrated human differences. In our country, especially, we sing the praises of the rugged individualist. At the same time, though, society sometimes pushes us to be like everyone else. This desire for sameness goes against all the laws of nature.

Parents, too, sometimes forget the facts of life when it come to their own children. They accept physical differences such as height and hair color. But other kinds of differences — such as abilities and temperament — are not always easy for parents to accept.

Many parents want their children to be "above-average." Others expect their children to be like themselves. Some even want their children to do things they were never able to do themselves.

When children don't develop as expected, parents sometimes push them to do things that are not possible for them. Such efforts prevent children from using their energies to become what they were meant to be. Instead, children may become frustrated — even give up.

Parents help their children most when they follow the lessons of nature:

DON'T Push Children

If you had a plant that wasn't growing as fast as you'd like, would you pull it to make it grow faster? Of course not. Instead, you'd make sure that plant had everything it needed to grow. You'd know that some plants grow more slowly and flower at different times than others. All the fertilizer in the world is not going to make a poinsetta bloom before Christmas.

Like plants, some children bloom early and some are late bloomers. These differences don't necessarily mean one child is more or less bright than another. It just means they're different.

DON'T Compare Children With Others

Have you ever heard a parent say to a child, "Why can't you be more like your brother (or sister or father or cousin or friend)?" This is like saying to a starling: "Why can't you sing more like a nightingale?" It's a useless question.

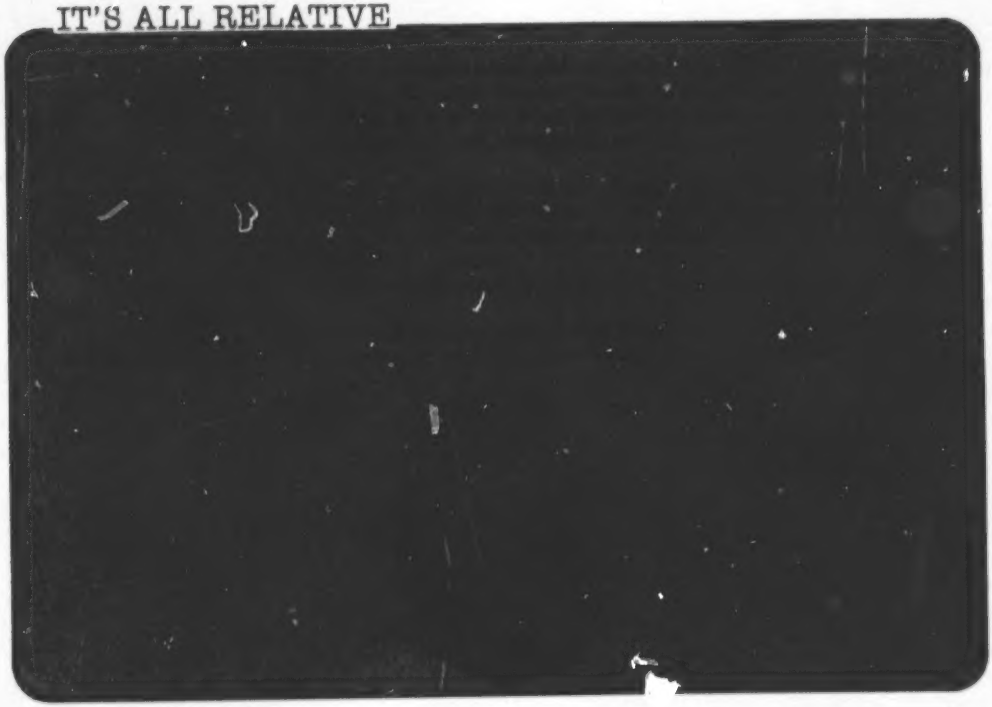
Not everyone can be first. Or best. Or above-average in everything. We all have built-in strengths and weaknesses. We each have a unique contribution to make to the world. Rather than comparing one child with another, it makes much more sense to help them both develop their own special talents.

DO Respond to Children as Individuals

Some plants need bright sunlight. Others wither under too much sun. Some plants must be watered daily. Others die if they're watered more than once a week. And there are some plants that will adapt to almost any conditions. The successful gardener soon learns to respond to the needs of individual plants.

The successful parent, too, is sensitive to differences among children. When parents give children the freedom to be themselves — as Joey's and Della's parents did — they are truly nurturing growth and development.

IT'S ALL RELATIVE



DO Enjoy Differences

Respecting and prizing children's differences benefits parents as well as children. Parents who don't expect their children to fit into a mold are more comfortable with their children and themselves. They feel less of the anxiety and more of the joy of being a parent.

Many of us have looked with awe at the beauty and variety of snowflakes. We marvel at how each new flake is different from the last. The same miracle takes place every day when a child is born. For mothers and fathers who open their eyes and hearts to this wonder of nature, parenthood can truly be a spring, summer, fall and winter wonderland.

FILM REVIEW SECTION

No Comparison

Ted and Sandy Marshall and their two children, Portia and Marc, are at the annual picnic held by Sandy's family, the Wilsons. Sandy and Marc, like the other members of Sandy's family, have always done well at sports. They are looking forward to the games that will take place that day. Ted and Portia, who are not athletically inclined, are less eager.

Portia has a hard time at the picnic. The other children won't let her play ball with them because she can't run fast enough. They call her a "baby" when she won't climb a tall slide. Sandy and Ted disagree about how to help Portia. Sandy urges Portia not to be afraid and to keep on trying. Ted wants Sandy to leave Portia alone.

Finally, Portia takes things into her own hands and runs away. When she is found, she explains that she doesn't like picnics because she can't run fast enough. Sandy finally sees that Portia is not a carbon copy of herself, but an individual with her own interests and abilities.

WHY WAS IT SO IMPORTANT TO SANDY THAT PORTIA PARTICIPATE IN THE FAMILY FUN AND GAMES?

ACTIVITY PAGES

activity #1
WHAT IF . . . ?

Both Joey's and Della's parents accept and enjoy their children as they are. They follow the cues that Joey and Della give.

What might have happened if Joey's and Della's parents were not so sensitive? What might have been the results if . . .

. . . Joey's parents had pushed him to walk before he was ready?

. . . Della's parents expected her to be a girl who was "sugar and spice and everything nice?"

. . . Joey's parents did not provide him with lots of stimulation?

. . . Della's parents had tried to toilet train her before she was ready?

activity #2
WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Now put yourself in the place of Joey's and Della's parents. In each of the following situations how would you help the other adults understand and work with your child's individuality?

Della is now 1 year old, and you have to be gone for an entire day to attend an out-of-town wedding. You have hired a babysitter to stay with Della.

What would you tell the babysitter about how to care for Della?

Joey is 4 now, and you have come to pick him up after his third day at nursery school. His teacher mentions that when the class goes outside to play, Joey always looks at leaves and flowers while the other children play games.

How would you respond?

activity #3
SCRAMBLED WORDS

Children differ from each other in many ways. Unscramble the letters in each of the following words to come up with 10 of these ways.

REDEHTIY _____

SCOIBLITIAY _____

TENTANOIT NAPS _____

GRNEEY _____

BILATISEI _____

PEARNAPACE _____

GULERTIRAY _____

TISSENVITIY _____

ERTA FO OPEMTNEDLEV _____

NERIVNOTMEN _____

GRAB BAG

to do

1. Observe how children are different from each other. In a day care center, nursery school, Head Start center, or your neighborhood, look for 2 children who are about the same age. Note how each of these children is an individual in his or her:

   physical strength and coordination
   energy level
   verbal skills
   ability to get along with other children
   special interests and talents
   time spent on any one task.

   Write up a paragraph or two on each child describing how they are different.
2. Talk to your parents about how you are different from your brothers and/or sisters. Ask how you differed from each other as babies, as toddlers, as first graders, and at other ages. How do you differ from each other now?
3. Invite an obstetrician, pediatrician or pediatric nurse to talk to your class about how babies differ at birth.
4. With your classmates, make a list of ways that we all differ from each other — physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Does this list apply to children as well as to adults? Do people become more alike or different as they grow older?

to discuss

1. Think back to your own childhood:

   Did you ever feel uncomfortable because you weren't like other members of your family?
   Did you ever worry that you weren't what your parents expected?
   How did this make you feel?
   How do you think it affected your behavior and growth?
2. Why is it difficult sometimes to accept people as they are? Do you think it will be hard for you to accept the differences among your own children?
3. Do you agree with this statement?

   to be nobody-but-myself — in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else — means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight and never stop fighting.

   — e.e. cummings
   A Miscellany
   George Firmage, ed.

   What would society be like if everyone were the same? (See *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell.)
4. Does our educational system adequately take into account individual differences?
5. Do these two African proverbs apply to the theme of human individuality? How?

   The moon moves slowly, but it crosses the town.
   Wood may remain ten years in the water, but it will never become a crocodile.
6. A stereotype is an expectation that all members of a certain group (for example, women or men, black people or white people, college students or construction workers) will act alike:

   How do stereotypes begin?
   How do they interfere with growth and development?
   What can we do to prevent or change stereotypes?
   Have you ever felt stereotyped?

GRAB BAG

to research

1. Studies with identical twins. What do these studies show about how identical twins are like and unlike each other at birth and in later years?
2. The causes of child abuse as they relate to this theme. Is the abuse of some children by their parents related to the parents' lack of awareness about how children differ from
3. The ways in which one person's body differs from another's. (See the book *You Are Extraordinary* by Roger Williams.)
4. The wide age ranges associated with some of the skills young children learn — for example, when different children learn to walk, talk, or share toys.

BOOK BROWSING

Here are some books that will give you more information on...

...how you are an individual

The Individual. Paul Good. New York: Time-Life Books, 1974.

You Are Extraordinary. Roger Williams. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1969.

...how children are different

Infants and Mothers. T. Berry Brazelton, M.D. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1969. (paperback)

Your Child is a Person. Stella Chess, Alexander Thomas, and Herbert Birch. New York: The Viking Press, 1965. (paperback)

...what society would be like if human differences were ignored

Animal Farm. Geoge Orwell. New York: New American Library, 1974. (paperback)

Brave New World. Aldous Huxley. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. (paperback)

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